



FIVE

SERMONS.

By THOMAS HOWE.



[Price One Shilling and Six-pence.]

60

FIVE

S. E. R. M. O. N. S.

BY THOMAS HOWE.



FIVE S E R M O N S

ON THE
Following SUBJECTS,

Viz.

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|--|---|
| I. THE WONDERS OF GOD
IN THE DEEP. | III. IV. THE MYSTERY
OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE
TO BE EXPLAINED HERE-
AFTER. |
| II. CHRIST'S DOMINION
OVER THE WIND AND
SEA. | V. GOD CORRECTS, YET
PARDONS HIS PEOPLE. |

Preached at YARMOUTH, in NORFOLK,

On some Occasions of great Losses and Distresses by
THE SEA ; and now published, with a particular View
to the Consolation of the many Sufferers by THE LATE
HARD GALE of WIND.

By THOMAS HOWE.

L O N D O N :

Printed for E. and C. Dilly in the Poultry.

M.DCC.LXXI.

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The Reader is desired to correct the under-mentioned mistakes of the Printer.—Page 10, line 21, for sudden, read sunken; page 11, line 9, a full stop, instead of a comma, after the word nigh; page 16, line 8, for dependance, read dependence.

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By THOMAS HOWARD

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Printed for H. and C. Dilly in the Strand.

M D C C I X X I



S E R M O N I.

THE WONDERS OF GOD IN THE DEEP.

Preached Nov 4th, 1770.

PSALM cvii. 23, 24.

THEY THAT GO DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS,
THAT DO BUSINESS IN GREAT WATERS:
THESE SEE THE WORKS OF THE LORD, AND
HIS WONDERS IN THE DEEP.

IN offering this subject, I am sure to
engage your attention: a circum-
stance that must be always agreeable
to a public speaker, and especially
to a christian minister. Yet you will excuse me
if I mention one fear that gives some allay to
that satisfaction: it is this—lest your attention
should be fixed in an improper manner. The
subject, however useful and important, is not so
common for the pulpit. Should this circum-
stance of novelty raise an expectation of amuse-
ments, should you listen as you would do to an
adventure, or some entertaining story, you will

this

B

meet

meet with mortifying disappointment and disgust ; and, what I fear more, your minds will be injured instead of being improved. I mention this fear only to prevent it ; and those with whom the caution is least necessary, will most readily excuse it.

To assist your improvement of the words now read to you, I shall pursue this plain and obvious method. I shall mention some of the wonders of the great deep : Show you how the hand and the works of God therein ought to be observed : And in the close, address the subject principally to those “ Who go down to the sea “ in ships, and do business in the great waters.” May God assist me ! I mean your present and eternal good.

All the wonders of God in the deep I cannot mention ; I know not all : but the following particulars are obvious. The vast extent of the seas, yet limited and governed as they are by divine power ; the creatures that inhabit the seas ; the business done upon these mighty waters ; the awful judgments of God in the great deep ; and the wonderful instances of his delivering mercy you sometimes meet with there. In each of these I would point out the hand of God to you.

I may not perhaps always use terms that are the most proper to the business and language of mariners : nor am I much concerned for that. I don't fear but you will understand me ; and my business is, not to teach you naval terms, but to assist

assist you in improving your profession to the knowledge of God. And in order to this, consider in the first place, the vast extent of the seas, and how they are limited and governed, notwithstanding, by the divine power.

I told you lately, upon a different subject, that the waters cover above half, it is generally supposed three fourths, of the surface of the globe; and when you get out into the larger oceans, at a considerable distance from land, you have not line enough to find the bottom. What a mass of water this! when you let your meditations dwell upon it a little, the thought grows upon you, till the mind fills with the grandeur of it. Thousands of leagues you may sail, and see nothing but the vast deep on which you float, and the immense firmament, the expanse of heaven above! A sailor, surely, has the largest view of the works of God! How natural is it for you in this situation to reflect thus—"This vast
"abyss, is but as "the drop of the bucket"(a) to
"the creation of God! What then is that God
"who spoke this amazing frame of the universe
"into being! How unfathomable his infinite
"nature! Boundless and deep as this ocean seems,
"it has its limits: but my God has no bounds to
"his perfections—to his goodness. Large as are
"these seas, to supply the earth with springs,
"without exhausting, how much more inexhausti-
"ble the ocean of the godhead! "All my springs,
"all the springs of the universe, are in him."(b)

(a) Isa. xl. 15.

(b) Psalm, lxxvii. 7.

And

And what a noble display here of the sovereign dominion, as well as infinite nature, of the Lord of all; who rules and limits this awful, raging, and to us unmeasurable deep! Vast as it is, the prophet tells you, that "he measures" "these waters in the hollow of his hand." (c) Such a text as that you should carry in your minds when you are travelling the face of the deep. "All this extended ocean is less to that sovereign being, whose presence is immense, than "a few drops of water I could hold in my "hand, are to me!"

When in a deep and hollow sea, you seem, as the Psalmist here expresses it just after the text, to "mount up to heaven, and then again to descend into the deep," you should remember that it is the command of God that thus "raises the "stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the "sea;" and learn from thence that these winds and waves are but his servants, and in their utmost fury, not only are under his controul, but in an orderly manner, and with perfect regularity, fulfil his will. His command raises their boisterous tumult, or hushes them into a calm. "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: "when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest "them." (d)

All the pride of those swelling mountains of the deep, that triumph over the feeble powers of man, and fill him with amaze and horror, falls under his sovereign rebukes: and it is a pleasing

(c) Isa. xl. 12. (d) Psalm, lxxxix. 9.

and happy frame of mind, in such circumstances, to take refuge in this dominion of God over the sea. "He has set his throne upon its waves;" (e) "he gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap; he layeth up the depths in store houses." (f) "He brake up for it his decreed place, and set bars and doors; and said, Hitherto shall thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." (g)

Herein then adore, not only his sovereignty, but his awful majesty, who has such a storehouse, such a magazine in readiness to chastise a guilty world if he pleases: herein too adore the glories of Emmanuel, who "rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still; and it obeyed him." (h)

Secondly, the creatures that inhabit the sea, may also teach you the wonders and the works of God.

It is a countless multitude of beings that dwell in those watery regions. The different species or kinds of creatures that have been discovered therein, are almost innumerable if brought into catalogue. An endless variety, from that great "Leviathan which God has made to play therein," (i) to the smallest fish that passes though the sea. These are his works; for at the creation, "God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature

(e) Ezek. xxviii. 2. (f) Ps. xxxiii. 7. (g) Job. xxxviii. 10, 11.

(h) Mark iv. 39.

(i) Psalm civ. 26.

"that

“ that hath life. And God created great whales,
 “ and every living creature that moveth, which
 “ the waters brought forth abundantly after
 “ their kind. And God blessed them, saying,
 “ Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in
 “ the sea.”(k) And how effectual is that word to
 this day ! Though they prey upon each other,
 though men destroy innumerable multitudes of
 them continually ; yet now they fill, and even
 croud the sea. Herein adore the wisdom of God
 that formed them, in all their various ranks, for
 the element in which they live—that contrived
 such a variety of beings to display his power and
 goodness : Adore the omniscient eye that counts
 all their multitudes, and knows every individual
 from the surface to the bottom of the deep, and
 through all its bounds.

Adore the bounty of the common father, who
 feeds even the fishes of the sea : For these are a
 part of his family, and he provides for them. (l)

Adore him who rules among these nations of
 the deep—who still preserves their several kinds,
 their rank and subordination—who still brings
 them to the hook or the net, or orders them
 away as he pleases : Thus Jesus did, when he
 gave a particular fish to the hook, and after
 that, a large draught of fishes to the net of
 Peter. (m) O ! that admirable Jesus ! How
 omniscient, how almighty, how sovereign, his
 power in the deep !

(k) Gen. i. 20, 22.

(l) Psa. civ. 27, 28.

(m) Matt. xviii. 27. John xxi. 6.

Adore that goodness which gave all that passeth through the paths of the sea to the use of man, that enriched the ocean with these living treasures, and made it a constant store-house of food and wealth for him. This leads me

Thirdly, to point out to you the works and the wonders of God in the business that is done upon the seas.

It is not to my purpose, nor would be to your improvement, were I capable of it, to enumerate or descant upon the arts and contrivances of men, by which the business of navigation is brought to such perfection as at present. This you may observe, that it is a part of the plan of the divine government, by which God is carrying on his designs in the world. And as he first taught Noah the structure of the ark by immediate revelation, so all the subsequent improvements of later ages are to be ascribed to the God of wisdom, "who teaches men knowledge." (a) Nor is it an inconsiderable instance of the divine government over the minds of men, that there should be so strong a taste, inclination or propensity, in multitudes, for naval occupations. God thus fits his instruments for the work his providence designs. And observe what great things God has done, and is doing hereby.

The distant parts of the world are by this means discovered and made accessible to each other. Scarcely any discoveries are made by land. Nations upon the same continent have

(a) Psalm xciv. 10.

been for ages, and probably must ever have been unknown to one another, had they not been discovered by the sea. By this means the regions of the earth have been gradually opening to view, and will be so, till every great design of providence in the mutual intercourse of mankind is accomplished.

What large and desolate parts of the earth have been hereby already peopled, planted, and cultivated ! Thus God settles out his family ; and finds room for support and employ for them as they grow.

The various and important advantages received from hence, both to the nations that employ their fleets, and the nations that are visited by them, are scarcely to be conceived. The numbers employed in foreign merchandize, the multitudes that navigate the ships, and those occupied in the variety of trades concerned therein, bear a large proportion in all civilized nations.

Every part of the world furnishes something peculiar, something it can spare, and that another wants. And although, through the wickedness of men, they may in many instances communicate their vices and follies to one another, yet it is evidently a wise and gracious plan of providence, and, notwithstanding all abuse, answers many great and valuable purposes.

The family of God is hereby, as it were, brought together ; various languages become familiar ;

familiar connections and friendships too, formed through the world; and many savage nations become civilized. It is true this extension of commerce often occasions the larger spread of war; but it also makes way for the increase of knowledge, and in the end for the general spread of the gospel of Christ. For the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, “as the waters “do the sea.”(o)

Thus God has “his way in the sea :”(p) And while men are traversing the globe either for trade or war, he makes them his instruments, to spread the knowledge of his name abroad, and “his saving health unto all nations.”(q) But, In the fourth place, let us turn our thoughts to another method, by which God makes himself known in the great deep, viz. by the awful judgments of his hand.

Might I not mention a naval war as one of the judgments of God?

Violent as are the passions of men, and their rage for destroying one another, one might think that such a barrier as the rolling ocean might keep them in peace, and sufficiently divide their bounds; though a means of friendly intercourse between them. But they no sooner learn to traffic upon the sea, than they learn to plunder and fight upon it too—add to its terrors the greater horrors of war, contrive to stain its waves with blood, and to sink each other in the deep. If this is now become necessary—if God

(o) Isa. xi. 9.

(p) Pf. lxxvii. 19.

(q) Pf. lxvii. 2.

permits—if God over-rules this for good; yet surely it is a judgment upon the pride and covetousness of men.

The tempest, the stormy wind, the foaming fury of the agitated waves, may be, they are all useful, and for the general good: But they are judgments still sent to correct, to awaken, to convince a guilty, careless world.

What multitudes are continually swallowed up in the deep in every part of the world! And, in one part or another, it may be every hour some are buried in this watery grave. Thousands of ruined merchants, ten thousand widows and orphaned children, attest the truth; while the bottom of the ocean is paved with the wrecks of their fortune, and the bones of their dead.

And lest men inured to these awful scenes, should not observe the hand of God in them, he not unfrequently orders these events to overtake them in the most unexpected manner, without any foreseen cause, or danger.—A sudden rock—an unknown sand—or a thousand other circumstances, may in a few moments bury all their hopes, ruin all their projects, and expose them, if life is preserved, to inconceivable distresses on the wide ocean, without relief, but in God alone: And it is then, indeed, his gracious interposition is most remarkably seen. This leads me therefore to remind you in the

Fifth place, of the wonders of divine mercy you often meet with on the sea.

It is the God of salvation that continually preserves us, and delivers us from surrounding evils, seen, and unseen : Yet we are not so ready to see and acknowledge this, till he makes our danger great, that his own hand may appear the more conspicuous in our rescue.

No men have more experience of this than those who do business upon the seas, where all relief is far, and God alone is nigh, What scenes of distress does he sometimes lead them through, and support them under ! Some accounts of this kind are distressing only to read.

Here—a tender, leaky, masteless hull, the wreck of many preceding storms, driven about at the mercy of the still furious waves, with a famished, sickly, dying crew, ready to devour, and, in some instances, devouring one another ! There—an open boat, burthened with despairing creatures, who just now saw their deserted ship go down, with all their hopes, many, many leagues from land, or it may be, know not where they are, without a compass, without provision, and all but life is gone. But then God is their pilot and their friend : he steers them, against their designs, it may be, into the way of relief—brings a stranger to be their friend, and orders a gale that threatens to overwhelm them, which drives that stranger out of his course, that he may find these objects of distress.—Another becomes the prey of pirates, or national enemies, and gives up his liberty and property together, perhaps, without any present hopes of redemp-

tion : But the God of war sends a commission after them, regains them before they reach the land of their captivity. Some have spent years in bondage, but God has found them out, made them friends, and restored them to their native shores. These are judgments and mercies mingled—judgments ordained to teach you, what God can do in a way of mercy.

Often, very often, you experience the scene the Psalmist here describes—“ You mount up “ to the heaven, you go down again to the “ depths ; your soul is melted because of trouble ; you reel to and fro, and stagger like a “ drunken man, and are at your wit’s end”—all hope is gone.

But at length “ he maketh the storm a calm,” gives you rest after all your fatigue, and brings you joyful into your desired haven. Such wonders of mercy do you see : And so much the more to be wondered at, when you consider how little that God is acknowledged, who worketh all these deliverances for you.

This is indeed a just cause of lamentation to all, yet too little, too seldom lamented : Let me therefore, before I close this discourse, throw this upon the thoughts of those of you, who are used to take notice of the public proceedings of the divine government, and make it your practice to observe, and lament the general neglect with which the great God is treated. I doubt not there are those among you, with whom this is a serious and frequent business ; who have something

something of the same spirit with the author of this psalm, frequently crying out, as you observe the proceedings of God with us, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (r) earnestly wishing that it were so in common, and lamenting that it is not.

And especially in the present crisis; when wars, the plague, and pestilence among the cattle, spread so much in the nations round about us, and the alarm of war so nearly affects ourselves.

I doubt not but many of you are seriously humbling yourselves before God under these general rebukes. Now, I say, let me fix this object particularly in your view—the divine government over the seas—the wonders God has done for our guilty land upon these great waters ---and then, especially lament it, that the God of the seas is neglected, affronted, and dishonoured, in the manner he is by us.

Should we have a war, its principal transactions must be upon the seas: and what can we expect from him who holds the winds and waves in his hands, and who at best is so much left out of our account, amidst the preparations for war! But let it be your concern to honour him in these, as well as all his other works, and lament the naval part of our national sins.

But I must remember the promise I made at the beginning of this discourse, and close with

(r) Verse 8, 15, 21, 31.

an address to those "who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters."

I look upon you, brethren, with the greatest respect as fellow citizens—esteem you as the most valuable members of the British community. The strength and wealth of our empire is with you. You go through dangers for us far and near, and, in proportion, your recompence is small; your profession and character therefore, as citizens, is the more honourable. My heart enters affectionately into all your hazards and fatigues, and sincerely rejoices in all your successes. Sometimes, indeed, I almost envy you—envy you only the experience you have of the wonders of God in the deep.

Some of you, I trust, have reason to bless God for all you have seen and met with—and do daily give him glory for the good he has done you by your sufferings: O that it were the case with all! But, have you not heard many who blaspheme the name of that God who holds them over the deep, and while they hang over the abyfs, damn themselves to the lowest hell? Have you not seen many, who after all the dangers and mercies of the seas, pollute both the foreign and their native shores, with debaucheries and excess? I will not suppose you have been more than witnesses to these things—that is enough to make you tremble. Can you wonder that the sea sometimes groans with its burden? Do you not rather wonder at the safety with which you go out and return, voyage after voyage, under the protection

protection of that God whose name is so much blasphemed among you?—Wonder not at the awful rebukes of providence—wonder not that the winds and waves, which obey the laws of their maker, sometimes reprove the insolent rebellion of men—wonder rather that ever the cries of distressed blasphemers should reach the ear of God, and that he should command a calm for those who so often challenge his power and wrath!

Why is it, brethren, such cries ever reach the ears of God? Why is it the armed elements do not more frequently hurry guilty men into hopeless and endless misery? Why? but because there is an intercessor, an advocate for the guilty, a friend of sinners, even the Son of God himself. Jesus, brethren—let me turn your thoughts to Jesus: His blood has a prevailing voice, or your cries in distress would be in vain. Those mighty waves of the sea, if indeed armed with justice alone, would at once overwhelm you: But, in all their most dreadful fury, they are but the instruments of love, and under the direction of sovereign goodness.

The floods of justice fell upon the head of Jesus—oppressed him with sorrow—sunk him in the grave; yet he was mighty to bear it—to survive, by rising from the dead, and now lives with God to intercede for you—and obtains for you those wonders of mercy you often receive in the deep.

Go to your retirement then, and ponder deeply upon this. Search the scriptures, and see if these things are just. You will find them so; and, perhaps, be surprised that you saw them not in the same light before. Think of them, till you learn to adore the love of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and place your future dependance there. You will then go upon the seas in peace with God, with confidence in his presence and care, and will see his glory in all the wonders of the deep. You will receive his rebukes as the corrections of a father; you will rejoice in his protection as the fruit of his love; you will see mercies mingled with all your disappointments and losses; in the immediate views of death, you will have hope of a better world, and a glorious exchange; when instead of your designed port, you are landed on the heavenly shores, and there feel yourselves in possession of eternal bliss!

May God write these things upon your hearts! And may the blessed Jesus, who appeared to his disciples in the storm, and saved them from perishing, save us all from the burning lake, which is the second death, and conduct us safely through the voyage of life, to the haven of everlasting rest! Amen!

S E R-



S E R M O N II.

CHRIST'S DOMINION OVER THE WIND AND SEA.

Preached Dec. 23d, 1770.

M A R K IV. 41.

AND THEY FEARED EXCEEDINGLY, AND SAID,
ONE TO ANOTHER, WHAT MANNER OF MAN
IS THIS, THAT EVEN THE WIND AND THE SEA
OBEY HIM!

UPON hearing these words, you will immediately conclude, the event that directed my thoughts to them: THE TERRIBLE GALE OF WIND BY WHICH WE WERE ALARMED ON THE LAST WEDNESDAY MORNING is the subject of every conversation, possesses every mind. That awful morning will be long remembered. Multitudes are even now lamenting their husbands—their fathers—their children lost; their property—their all—their little all swallowed up: Multitudes still agitated with uncertainty between anxious hopes and distressing fears; too soon, will many of them change those fears for more painful certainty, and for years to come will re-

D

peat,

peat, with a punctuality peculiar to deep and lasting sorrow, that, on WEDNESDAY MORNING DECEMBER 19, 1770, they lost all that was dear to them in the world, by a dreadful storm of wind !

Feel for these sufferers, my brethren, "Weep "with them that weep," (a) send up many a prayer for them, and thereby bring down blessings, to supply their loss, to ease their pains.

But there is another and larger view, in which this event ought to be considered by all the inhabitants of our land. In the present circumstances, it surely ought to be considered as a national rebuke. Some powerful neighbouring nations evidently declare their hostile intentions against us. War is a plague, a scourge to mankind ; yet a foolish people, wanton with an excess of luxury, wish for this plague—provoke, and call for this rod of God to correct them. But, behold, how God reproves the pride and confidence of nations ! If the plagues and wars that ravage and depopulate other countries, will not humble us, he sends his judgments home. The waters of heaven (the store-house of God to enrich the earth) are sent to rebuke us with a deluge upon great part of the country : A national judgment this ! thousands immediately suffer by it ; many are ruined in their property ; all must at length feel its effects. But, if this will not awaken us, God speaks now with a louder voice---a voice that awakens every slum-

(a) Rom. xii. 15.

berer in the land; the voice of the stormy wind, that tells you, louder than thunder, and yet in accents of mercy too, how easily he can make all the strength and pride of our nation “sink as lead in the mighty waters.”(b) O that it may be generally heard, and suitably regarded in this view!

But is there nothing but the language of terror in such events? Do they admit of no consolation? Yes, blessed be God, they do. Whatever be the fate of nations---whatever be the issue of things for this world with any of us---the sincere disciples of Christ may “rejoice in him, and joy in the God of their salvation.”(c) And it is with a sincere desire to promote this your joy, that I have introduced the passage of scripture first read to you.

Our Lord, and his disciples, were now crossing the sea of Galilee in the night; on a sudden, “there arose a great storm of wind; the waves of the sea beat into the ship, so that” the evangelist says, “it was now full.”(d) In this imminent danger, Jesus himself was asleep in the stern of the ship. The disciples, in the utmost terror and alarm, wake him with “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”(e) This abrupt language is very emphatical. Every man is eloquent in distress. The apprehension of instant death, dictated a language that seems inconsistent with that awful respect they really had for their Lord. They did not seriously doubt

(b) Ex. xv. 10. (c) Hab. iii. 18. (d) Ver. 36, &c. (e) Ver. 38.

his care, but they wished for his notice and compassion of their distress, and possibly, had some hope of deliverance from him. Hope in danger gives language, gives activity to fear---the reverse of sullen despair. This hope appears more evident in the parallel expressions of Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, "Lord, save us, we perish :"(f) In Luke, "Master, master, we perish,"(g) "perish without thy instant help."

But such feeble hope, under the influence of predominant fear, though all that could be expected in such circumstances in common, was not all that was due to the character of their divine master, who was on board with them, and made their case not common. When therefore, Jesus had "rebuked the wind," and restored calmness to the sea, he reproves them for the excess of their fear, and the weakness of their faith, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"(h)

This soft, but just remonstrance, joined with the miracle instantly performed upon the raging elements, opened their eyes at once to a striking view of their own weakness, and the glory of their Lord; and under that strong impression, they tremble at the presence of their deliverer, "they feared exceedingly."(i) So near a view of divine majesty, to minds, that moment, under the alarm of immediate death, and now con-

(f) Matt. viii. 25. (g) Luke viii. 24. (h) Verse 40.
(i) Verse 41.

scious of their guilty weakness therein, must be almost too much for humanity to bear---too much glory, had it not been clothed with humanity: But the humble form in which Jesus appeared amongst them, in some measure mitigates these terrors; their minds recover themselves, and their fears are turned into admiration. "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him!"

He appeared as a man; but his works were divine. They well knew, nothing but the power that gave being to these creatures, could thus command and restrain them; "that God alone can at his command raise up the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves of the sea,"^(k) or "rule the raging of the sea,"^(l) make the storm a calm, and say to the impetuous waves, "Hitherto shall ye come, and no farther."^(m) He often puts the proof of his deity upon this exercise of sovereign dominion over the wind and the sea; "who hath gathered the wind in his fists?"⁽ⁿ⁾ "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?"^(o) Yet they saw Jesus exercise the same dominion, and with the same authority and effect, that is peculiar to God. "He rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace, be still;' and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."^(p) Hence therefore you see, that the divine government in this world of ours is administered by Christ.

(k) Ps. cvii. 25. (l) Ps. lxxxix. 9. (m) Job. xxxviii. 11.

(n) Prov. xxx. 4. (o) Is. xl. 12. (p) Ver. 39.

" He

“He is Lord of all.”(q) He rules with the authority, power, and wisdom of God, but still in the character of the mediator, and in subserviency to the great designs of his mediation. Under this character the father addresses him, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.”(r) To this purpose, “all power is given to him in heaven and on earth;”(s) “all things are put under him;”(t) he filleth all things;” and “is head over all things to the church.”(u) Even the wind and the sea therefore are, not only subject to his command, but are managed by him for the most merciful purposes.

“This” you will say, “is indeed a delightful thought; honourable to Christ, and reviving to his disciples: But, why then does this glorious redeemer suffer these storms to rage? If they are in his gracious hands, why does he let loose their fury in such awful, such dreadful effects?” Dreadful effects I acknowledge them to be, with respect to many individuals; with respect to the present hour of their distress: But, if you had a mind that could penetrate into all his counsels---had you an eye that could see through all his kingdom, and survey all that is carrying on throughout his empire of heaven and earth,—you would find another name for these dreadful effects. “This” you say, “is poor satisfaction---the plea of ignorance will never support the mind under

(q) Acts x. 36. (r) Heb. i. 8. Psalm xlv. 6.

(s) Matt. xxviii. 18. (t) i Cor. xv. 27.

(u) Eph. i. 22, 23.

“ great

“ great calamity.” I will therefore give a more direct answer to this too passionate, though excusable demand, and assert, that the most awful exercise of Christ’s dominion over the wind and the sea, is perfectly consistent with, and in conformity to, his character of the Saviour.

To convince you of this, please to observe, that when he put to sea with his disciples in the evening, he certainly foresaw the storm that would overtake them, and all the circumstances of danger attending it ; nay, it was thus ordered and directed by him : He gave the wind and the sea this commission, in order to bring them into those circumstances of trial. And no doubt it was with the same view, that though he foresaw the storm, he gave way to the weariness of his exhausted body, and retired to sleep : For, notwithstanding the labours of the day, it had been easy to him, to have supported and renewed the animal spirits without rest, had he thought proper. The evident design therefore, of this dispensation, was for their trial ; to awaken conscience in them ; to teach them their weakness ; to give them renewed displays of his divine perfections ; exercise his love in their deliverance ; and strengthen their faith in him, as the author of eternal salvation.

Now, christians, let your minds possess this sentiment—fully take it in—drink largely of these waters of consolation. Consider, land and sea, storms and tempests, not only as in the hands of Christ, and subject to his dominion, but as
directed

directed by him, to carry on the plan of saving mercy, and all conspiring together with his love. Consider his proceedings herein, under the following particulars.

First, as designed to humble, and convince men of sin—to awaken a guilty world—to rouse up the dying principles of conscience : And is not this a work proper for the Saviour? He himself bore the weight of our guilt, and therefore knows all its terrors : He knows the worth of souls, for “ he bought them with his blood :” (w) He knows the glories of heaven, —the weight of the divine displeasure—and the miseries of hell, into which men are plunging themselves. He proclaims these things with his word ; but men will not hear : May he not then send a tempest after them, to teach them, by a louder voice, their guilt, their danger, the worth of their souls, and their certain misery without a Saviour? If he sees a race of formal professors, declining in their characters, asleep with the world, and “ the (few) things which remain ready to “ die,” (x) is it not worthy the character of the saviour, to take these hosts of God, which, with divine permission, would destroy the world, and employ them, as the king of grace, to awaken and alarm these sleepers, and thus carry on the designs of his love in their salvation? He has done thus many times.

He struck Saul and his companions to the ground, and took away his sight with the un-

(w) Acts xx. 28.

(x) Rev. iii. 2.

sufferable brightness of his glory; and made this the means of changing his heart. (z) He shook the soul of the jailor with an earthquake, and taught him thereby to cry out, "What shall I do to be saved?" (a) When he has let loose the rage of persecutors, has he not purified and revived his churches thereby—and watered the seeds of future harvest by the blood of his saints? He gives the dying martyrs a crown of life, and inspires others by their heroic death to be "baptized for the dead." (b) And thus all the judgements he sends into the world, though proofs of his displeasure against sin, are the fruits of his love to men, and graciously designed to make "the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness." (c) He hereby proves the truth of his word, tries the graces of his people, shows the value of his ordinances, corrects the formality, pride, and ignorance of professors, makes men feel that they have souls—that they are sinners—that heaven and hell are realities—and that they need a saviour. And,

Secondly, by these proceedings of his government, he displays his own glorious perfections.

The same spirit still remains in the world that possessed the Jewish unbelievers. They saw him in the lowest circumstances of humanity, and judging by the prejudice of their senses, could not believe him to be the Son of God. We indeed confess him to be so, according to the cus-

(z) Acts ix. 3—6. (a) Acts xvi. 25—30. (b) 1 Cor. 15. 29.

(c) Isa. xxvi. 9.

tomary form of the Christian profession : But the circumstances in which he appeared on earth, the humble characters and names he bears, and which are most familiar with us, make men too insensible to his divine excellencies, and thereby trifle with him, and neglect him. It is true he rules the world, yet the silent proceedings of his daily providence pass almost unnoticed : But when “ the arm of the Lord awakes, “ and puts on strength,”(*d*) and “ by terrible “ things in righteousness” he answers the long-recorded and well-remembered prayers of his church ;(*e*) then, in the day of visitation, men see his glory. Thus the impious Jewish scorners were rebuked in the midst of their insults. He made the sun hide his face in awful and præternatural darkness, while he expired on the cross—He rent the rocks with a tremendous earthquake—So he did when he rose from the dead. And why were these terrors of the Lord employed at the time he gave the most amazing instance of divine love ? Why, but to convince the world, it was the Son of God, the Lord of glory that died, and so subserve thereby the gracious purposes of his death in the salvation of men ? What is the principal lesson taught by the unparalleled calamities that soon after fell upon the Jewish nation ? Was not that “ the “ coming of the son of man ?” Did he not then “ appear in power, and with great glory ?”(*f*) Did not this vindicate, in the view of all the

(*d*) Isa. li. 9.(*e*) Ps. lxxv. 5.(*f*) Matt. xxiv. 30.

world, the honours of him who was crucified ? And on that account was a blessing to the world, and conformable to the glorious plan of redemption ? In such awful works of power and judgment, men are taught that he is the Lord, mighty to save or to destroy, that he justly claims their submission, and is a proper object of their confidence : At least this is the truth proclaimed hereby, whether man will hear or not. Jesus makes bare his arm, and proves himself divine.

And let it be observed, thirdly, that amidst the most awful displays of his power, he chiefly delights in the exercise of saving mercy.

The disciples thought themselves in the utmost danger : Apparently they were so. But their gracious master, whose care of them they seemed, by the language of their passion, to suspect, raised that storm to make his glory and his love appear the more conspicuous in their deliverance.

And when " his judgements are abroad in the " earth," how multiplied, various and illustrious are the instances of salvation ! We do indeed (and he allows us, we cannot help but) lament the public, or private distresses he lays upon us ; But does he not expect some notice to be taken of his mercy too, when it triumphs even in the midst of judgement, and appears the more illustrious thereby ? Suppose omnipotent justice, without a mediator, was to take a guilty world in hand ; suppose a sovereign God, not as a Saviour, but as an offended king, was to arm a-

gainst his rebellious creatures : Alas ! how soon would his wrath crush us to hopeless and endless misery ! But, behold ! the work committed to the hands of the Son of God, under the character of a Saviour : If he raises the stormy wind, to convince you his power is divine, still the glory of his divinity appears chiefly in the works of salvation, the instances of delivering and preserving mercy. Now,

This view of the governing power, and love of the Lord Jesus, may well fill our minds with the most admiring thoughts concerning him. It ought, christians, to make him more honourable in your esteem, more admirable in your eyes, more precious to your hearts. Every view of the great redeemer, every perfection of his nature, every work of his hand, is glorious : But sometimes we behold such united, such collected glories, that cannot fail but transport the believer.

He governs the world with the same love with which he died for it, and to the same purposes too ; and the proceedings of his providence are intended to unite in your view, the perfections of the God, and the compassions of the dying saviour.* Behold then, “ what manner of man “ is this ! ” If the disciples had just cause for such admiration, how much more have we, who

* This Sermon was preached on a sacrament day ; which may account for the turn of thought and expression here, and in some other places.

have such richer discoveries, both of his glory and his love, than they had, at that time !

They indeed, at all times, readily profess their faith in him, as “ the Son of God ;” but probably, before his resurrection, understood that phrase with respect to his office as mediator only, without any direct views to his divine nature : However that be, he now appeared to them as a man, and that raised this astonishment, that the wind and the sea should obey him. But they afterwards better understood—and now best of all understand, the glories of his person ; not indeed so as to lessen, but increase their admiration : They behold his glory now in heaven — still in the human form, but with brighter beams of the in-dwelling deity. And in their writings we behold his glories too. He is indeed at one time presented to us as an infant laid in the manger of a stable, his parents oppressed with poverty : We see him afterwards “ a man of sorrows ;”(g) through all his life, despised and persecuted ; at length seized by the hands of violence, unjustly condemned, nailed to a cross, and dying the most ignominious death : Yet we see this man give eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, limbs to the maimed, life to the dead, by his word.—Commanding devils, winds and seas, and they obey him ! We see him rise from the dead, behold him sitting at the right hand of God, Lord over all ! Angels,

(g) Isa. liii. 3.

principalities and powers, and all worlds subject to him !—" What manner of man is this !"

And what manner of love was it in the Son of God, with all his glories, to become the son of man—to become the servant of men—to labour—to suffer—to die for their salvation! Was he " in the form of God, and equal with God ;"(b) and yet " made flesh ?"(i) Was he " rich, yet for our sakes became poor ?"(k) Is he sovereign of the universe, yet would bear to be insulted and abused? Is he infinitely holy, and yet abused and condemned as a malefactor? Is he the author of life to the creation, and yet consent to die—to die an accursed death? What manner of man is this, that commands life, commands devils, commands angels too, yet suffers himself to be led to execution, and nailed to the cross! And what manner of love was that which carried him through such amazing scenes for sinful men!

Pleasing object of astonishment indeed! Pleasing object of reverence and love! Let me have the happiness to inspire your hearts with these sentiments towards the blessed Jesus:—Or if not—If there are any hearts irreverent to his glories, uninfluenced by his love, let me remind them that the day will come, when " those who " would not have this man to reign over them, " shall be brought forth and slain before his " face."(l)

(b) Philip. ii. 6. (i) John i. 14. (k) 2 Cor. viii. 9.
(l) Luke xix. 27.

Yes, Sirs, he himself admonished the contemptuous Jews of that awful day of his power, when he appeared among them as a poor necessitous man; even when he stood arraigned at their bar, silent to all the blasphemous falsehoods they charged upon him, when he patiently bore the insults of those who buffeted and spit upon him; even then, with serene Majesty, he binds over his judges to his own future tribunal, and reminds them, that “ hereafter they should “ see the son of man sitting on the right hand “ of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”(*m*) Yes, he is a sovereign king, and God is determined that “ to him every knee “ shall bow, and every tongue confess him “ Lord.”(*n*) “ He must reign,” Sirs, whether in your hearts or not, “ he must reign, till he “ has put all things under his feet.”(*o*) And “ then cometh the end;”(*p*) then he comes upon “ the throne of his glory :”(*q*) And then not only the wind and the sea, but these material “ heavens and earth shall fly away before his “ presence;”(*r*) and the most haughty of the sons of men who rejected his dominion, will then wish, vainly wish for “ the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from “ the face of the Lamb.”(*s*) May divine grace avert this awful doom from each of you! Would to God that every soul here might receive these glories of the redeemer with becoming reverence and joy: Joy, in that ability, that power

(*m*) Matt. xxvi. 64. (*n*) Phillip. ii. 10. (*o*) 1 Cor. xv. 25.

(*p*) Ibid ver. 24. (*q*) Matt. xix. 28 (*r*) Rev. xx. 11.

(*s*) Ibid vi. 16.

he has to save! How securely, under his protection, may you pass the voyage of life! How sure his promises! And how "able to keep" what you have committed to him until that "day!"^(t)

And finally, with what cheerfulness may the believer repose his confidence on the power and love of Christ, under the most painful events of providence!

Come, christians, let me lead you to his cross. —There you see a love as strong, as mighty; as his omnipotence himself: Consider that love; and that omnipotence as united in your glorious redeemer. Behold him that died on the cross, now sitting on the throne of his kingdom, and directing every event that concerns you. The same hand that was nailed to the tree, now holds the reins of government—holds the winds, limits the seas, and measures out every trial for you.

Will you then dishonour him so much as to suppose these raging elements are become too strong for him? Or that he who once died in love, is now become your enemy, and scatters curses upon you, when he shed his blood to purchase blessings? No, rather believe, believe upon the surest grounds, that he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;"^(u) that he has the same heart on the throne, as on the cross. Believe at least one

(t) 2 Tim. i. 12. (u) Heb. xiii. 8.

certain truth—that he suffers no storm to fall on you, equal to that he himself bore for you—that he puts no trial upon you, but he is able to support you under, to deliver you from it: In this assurance repose upon him. “Enter “into this chamber, and there hide yourselves “as it were,” from all the storms of life; “the “indignation” will soon “be overpast.”^(w) The voyage of life will soon be ended, and on the blissful shores of eternal peace and security, you will look back on all the wreck of earth and time, with a smile, and adore the power and love that conducted you through it all.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you “from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding “joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be “glory and majesty, dominion and power, both “now and ever. Amen!”

(w) Isaiah xxvi. 20.



S E R M O N III.

THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO BE EXPLAINED HEREAFTER.

Preached JAN. 20th, 1771.

J O H N XIII. 7.

JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, WHAT I DO THOU KNOWEST NOT NOW, BUT THOU SHALT KNOW HEREAFTER.

TH E S E words were addressed to Peter—the occasion was this.—Jesus, with amazing condescension, was now washing the feet of his disciples: For he not only “took upon himself the form of a servant”^(a)—not only became the servant of God for our salvation, but submitted to be the servant of men too. The son of God, when he became the son of man, “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”^(b) When in this humble office Jesus came to Peter—Peter seems to rise, and withdraw himself with an air of astonishment, “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?”^(c) “Can I

(a) Philip. ii. 7. (b) Matt. xx. 28. (c) Ver. 6.

“ ever bear, that my dear and honoured Lord
 “ and master, whom I know to be, the Christ,
 “ the son of the living God, *(d)* should stoop to
 “ this servile office for a poor sinful man, and
 “ wash my feet !” To this Jesus makes the re-
 ply in the text; which in other words is thus—
 “ You don’t at present, see my reasons for what
 “ I am now doing, but I shall soon inform you
 “ of my design therein.” Peter could not ap-
 prehend, notwithstanding this intimation, that
 there could be any sufficient reason for so extra-
 ordinary a proceeding, and therefore perempto-
 rily refuses.—“ No, Lord, I am amazed that
 “ thou shouldest offer such a thing—I am a-
 “ mazed my brethren should suffer it—But, for
 “ my-own part I am determined—No, Lord,
 “ thou shalt never wash my feet.” *(e)* Jesus
 tells him, “ If I wash thee not, thou hast no part
 “ with me ;” that is, “ you cannot be my disci-
 “ ple, unless you submit entirely to my autho-
 “ rity and direction.” Upon this, Peter, who
 never meant to dispute his Lord’s authority, not
 only submits, that Jesus should wash his feet,
 but desires him to wash “ his hands and his
 “ head also,” *(f)* though as yet he was ignorant
 of the reasons Jesus had for what he did. But
 the promise was soon fulfilled : For, as soon as
 Jesus had finished washing their feet, he explain-
 ed his conduct to them, viz. that he designed
 this as an example for them ; that since he, their
 Lord and master had thus condescended to this

(d) Matt. xvi. 16. *(e)* Ver. 8. *(f)* Ver. 9.

lowest office of friendship, they should be always ready to condescend to one another, even to the lowest of their brethren, in the offices of christian love. Now, had he mentioned this beforehand, as the reason of what he was going to do, much of the force of the example had been lost; and therefore he chooses to conceal his design in it, till he had gone through with all his disciples.

Had he said " You, my disciples, ought ever
 " most readily to stoop to the meanest offices
 " by which you can serve each other, and ex-
 " press your mutual love, and to set you the
 " example, I, whom you call your Lord and
 " master, will myself now condescend to be your
 " servant, and wash your feet;" no doubt the rest of them would have objected to it, as well as Peter, and would have urged their readiness to obey the precept, without so extraordinary an example. Thus the proceedings of divine wisdom may often be founded on reasons, which, we not only do not apprehend, but which, were we previously acquainted with them, would rather increase than remove our difficulties, though in the event they appear, even to ourselves, altogether worthy of God. The words of the text, therefore, may with equal propriety be applied to the providence of God in general, as to this particular instance. And the principal comfort we have, under all that darkness and ignorance in which we are at present involved, is this, that the most painful and mysterious dispensations
 are

are under the direction of our divine Lord and master, and that he will hereafter explain to us the wisdom and-goodness of those things that were most distressing, and at which we were most ready to be surprised.

Our ignorance with respect to the proceedings of the divine providence, appears in these two things—We know not what events lie before us—And we know not, in many instances, why God deals with us in the manner he does.

We know not what events lie before us—what is in the womb of providence coming forth upon us. “We know not, what a day or an “hour may bring forth:”(g) And common as this observation is, its importance is such, it cannot be too frequently presented to us, or too much inculcated upon us. “The times and “seasons God has put into his own power.”(b) They are not only out of our power, but out of our view.

That boasted foresight, therefore, which your men of sagacity pretend to, and that forecast too, which is founded upon it, so far as it can be depended upon, or is a duty or advantage to us, is little more than a prognostic of probable disappointment in the most prudent schemes, and providing for them. We talk indeed of to-morrow, but “we know not what shall be on “the morrow.”(i) All our designs, therefore, as to future life, should be formed upon an apprehension of that uncertainty to which they are

(g) Prov. xxvii. 1. (b) Acts i. 7. (i) Jam. iv. 14.
liable.

liable. And as we are thus ignorant of what lies before us, so we are greatly at a loss, in many instances, to account for it, why God should deal with us as he does.

I say, in many instances: For it must be taken with this limitation. The general design of God, in all his proceedings, is indeed manifest enough, viz. the happiness of his creatures upon the whole earth; and in many particular instances, the more immediate design of God therein may be easily understood. We may safely conclude, that extraordinary and merciful appearances of divine providence, are designed to awaken and improve our gratitude, and increase our usefulness in life: We are assured that the corrections of our heavenly father are “for our profit,”^(k) to take away sin, and that the trial of our faith may purify it. But notwithstanding this general truth, God is pleased sometimes to take such methods, in his proceedings with us, that, to our view, and as far as things appear to us, seem rather tokens of his displeasure, contrary to all design of good; and when he is correcting our sins, he seems taking vengeance upon us. If we see the end to be good, we do not apprehend the wisdom or suitability of the means, and can ill account for it, why the circumstances of our trials are ordered as they are; and if we acknowledge that they are ordered by the wisdom of God, this is the very thing that perplexes us, when we cannot

(k) Heb. xii. 10.

see the wisdom or reasonableness of them : Nay, many times, the very means by which the most desirable events have been brought about, appeared to us most adverse and contrary to any such end ; and though we at length see the goodness of God manifested, we can never fully account for it why he works by such means. A multitude of instances might be brought from the sacred oracles to illustrate this observation : I will select a few of them.

For instance, first turn your thoughts to that awful event which brought sin and misery into this part of the creation of God : I mean the transgression of our first parents.

It is true, their sin was voluntary, and an abuse of their natural freedom : But though this clears the divine perfections, and removes from God all charge of being any way the author of sin ; yet still there is darkness hangs upon this awful event.

We must not pretend to say, that God could not have prevented the temptation, or assisted the powers of innocent nature to resist it, in perfect consistency with the state of trial, and the nature and liberty of man : But why the great God thought proper to permit all that train of dreadful consequences, that have followed upon this apostacy, it is impossible for us to say. We know indeed, that by the rich discoveries of his grace in Jesus Christ, he has brought great good out of this evil : But to say God could not equally display the glory of his grace without

the

the fall of man—Or that what we see of the fruits of that grace in the gospel, is all the end answered by it, is going greatly beyond our depth. There must, therefore, in this case, be reasons and views in the divine mind, to us impenetrable, by which it appeared to infinite wisdom proper, rather to permit what he foresaw man would bring upon himself and posterity by his own wilful sin, than to interpose and prevent it.

In the same view we may take notice of that early consequence of the fall, the death of Abel. “God himself testified that he was righteous;” “and his works of righteousness were the fruits of his faith;”(1) now would it not appear to us, upon the view of such a case, quite necessary to give all encouragement to one of the first, if not the very first, who publickly professed his faith in the promised Messiah? Should we not conclude, that the goodness, the truth, the justice of God, were concerned, to preserve this his faithful servant from the hands of violence? Should we not be ready to think that such an untimely fall of so excellent a person, was a discouragement to the service of God—might lead men to cast reflections upon the divine providence—to distrust his promise concerning the victories of the woman’s seed—and seem to encourage sin and violence in its triumphs over goodness?

(1) Heb. xi. 4.

The same reasoning is applicable to many other instances, in which it appears, that the most eminent of the servants of God have been oppressed, and fallen a sacrifice to the wickedness of men, yea, that good men have in fact been discouraged hereby—that violent men have triumphed in their opposition, and taken occasion from thence to blaspheme the name, the promises, the ways, and the people of God.

When Abraham was called from his native country, he had the promise that his family should be multiplied, that his posterity should possess the land of Canaan, and “all the nations of the earth be blessed in his seed.”^(m) But how mysterious the ways in which these promises were fulfilled! The promise is limited to one son—and he not given till both the parents are in the decline of life: Isaac, the heir of these promises, when grown to maturity, is ordered to be sacrificed, and that by his father’s own hands; this order was not indeed carried into actual execution; and was given only to try his faith and obedience; but is it not a very mysterious method of trial? We doubt not God had reasons for it, altogether worthy of himself—that he had an undoubted right to do it—and this is almost all that we can say at present.

This promised seed increases very slow; Isaac has only two sons, while the other descendents of Abraham multiply amazingly, and become many nations soon: Of these two sons, the

(m) Gen. xxii. 16, &c.

youngest is chosen for the heir of the promises, and Jacob obtains the blessing by unlawful means. It was just in God to entail the blessing on which he pleased—but it was vile in Jacob to obtain it of his father by falsehood and deceit; yet the all-wise God brought about his own gracious designs by this means. Jacob, now the heir of the promises, is yet banished from his father's house, lives twenty years in exile, and servitude in a foreign land, while Esau, the profane despiser of the blessing, presently became a mighty prince; the patriarch's family indeed increases, but he has sorrow in them all; and when God designs to carry him into Egypt, for support, during a dreadful famine, the method in which he chooses to do it, is, by an awful bereaving him of his beloved son, and leading that son through a long series of distressing affliction. All things were indeed working together for good, but God chose to do it in a way that seemed, for a long while, to turn up nothing but evil. He engaged to settle the children of Israel in the land of Canaan; but he first places them in Egypt, in circumstances, in which, to all human appearance, it was impossible they should ever obtain the promised land; and, after all, it was four hundred years from the first promise before they were put in possession of it, while the other branches of the patriarchal family had been long settled into populous and powerful nations.

Again, Deep and mysterious are the divine counsels in the methods of redemption. We cannot, for instance, understand why the blessed

God should suffer the long period of four thousand years to intervene after the promise of the Messiah, before he appeared in the world. We believe indeed it was "the fulness of time,"⁽ⁿ⁾ and can discover many circumstances of the propriety, in the state of the world at his appearance. But then we know too, that for some thousands of years after this promise of a redeemer, the world was almost entirely lost in ignorance, and over-run with idolatry and wickedness; only here and there a family that preserved the knowledge and worship of the true God, and that in a very imperfect manner. We know that after the church of God was formed, it was for ages trained up under the bondage of carnal ordinances, types and shadows of good things to come. All the nations of the earth were to be blessed in Christ, yet in all that long interval before his coming, the word of promise, and the worship of God, were almost intirely confined to one nation, the descendents of Abraham. We doubt not these things were wisely ordered, but must not pretend to assign the reasons upon which the divine wisdom proceeded herein. It is a deep, and perhaps, will be an everlasting mystery, why the eternal God chose his own son for the suffering saviour.

Can we say, that he could not in any other way have glorified himself, discovered the evil of sin, and his love to sinners? We believe "it became him," was every way worthy of

(n) Gal. iv. 4.

God, "to make" his own son "the captain of
 "salvation," and to make him "perfect through
 "sufferings."^(o) We see, in many respects, the
 wisdom, as well as the grace of God, has abound-
 ed towards us herein: Yet after all "great is
 "the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the
 "flesh."^(p) The angels look into these
 "things:"^(q) Yet see but a little way into a deep
 that passes all understanding.

Nor ought we to pass over here the manner
 in which the gospel was propagated in the
 world, in which the proceedings of infinite
 wisdom were quite the reverse from what human
 prudence would have dictated.

The Apostles of Christ were poor, and un-
 learned men: They were Jews—a nation at that
 time in the last stage of degeneracy, and con-
 tempt too; and, "what were these feeble Jews to
 "do?"^(r) Why, they were to spread the know-
 ledge of God, and the faith of Jesus, and esta-
 blish his kingdom, through all the nations of
 the earth. And what method were they to take
 to accomplish this end? Why, they were to
 publish, wherever they came, that Jesus of Na-
 zareth, who was crucified at Jerusalem, was, after
 three days raised from the dead, and now as-
 cended into heaven, and that this Jesus is the
 Son of God, the Lord, and only saviour of men.
 They were therefore to require all men to seek
 salvation by him, and submit to his authority in

^(o) Heb. ii. 10. ^(p) 1 Tim. iii. 16. ^(q) 1 Pet. i. 12.
^(r) Neh. iv. 2.

the doctrines, ordinances, and precepts, they delivered in his name; having nothing to support this claim, but the evidence of truth, and the arguments taken from the future state. Now, was there any human probability of success in such a scheme as this?

That men who were disowned and persecuted by their own nation, and charged with falsehood and imposture—who had no friends, nor riches to procure any—no interest in courts, with great men, with philosophers, or priests, but had all these to contend with—whose doctrine was directly contrary to all the prejudices and vices of the world, to many of their most admired virtues, and destructive to the religion that every where prevailed, should yet subdue the world to the faith and obedience of their crucified master! In the event indeed, much of the wisdom of God appears in the contrivance; but it was so contrary to all human probability, that the world laughed at it as “foolishness.”^(s)

Once more, we may take notice of the dispensations of divine providence towards the christian church, since it has been established in the world, as in many respects to us unsearchable.

We should be ready to think, that when Christ was glorified, his kingdom would have met with nothing but prosperity and success in the world; we find it otherwise. We find this cause, for which Christ became incarnate, suffered and died, which had been the subject of

(s) 1 Cor i. 18, 21.

so many prophecies, and of which such glorious things are foretold, has always been in a suffering state. Persecution attended it in its infancy, as it did Christ himself : Many of its first and principal ministers were early put to death : Its young converts were exposed to the same sufferings as soon as they received the christian name, and were called out, in ten long persecutions, for more than two hundred years, to sow the seed of the rising church with their blood : But this was not all; the christian church was scarcely formed upon its divine institution, when false Apostles crept in unawares, corrupted the faith, divided the practice, and the hearts of christians from each other. Thus "the man of sin"⁽¹⁾ early appeared, and at length, the greatest part of the world was overspread with anti-christian principles, instead of the gospel ; heathen powers revived, and laid waste many christian countries ; and a vile, but most successful impostor, rooted out the christian name from many places, where the most flourishing churches had been planted ; and to this very day the pure religion of Jesus is confined to very narrow bounds.

These are mysteries in the divine government. We have indeed sufficient ground of assurance, that all these things are directed with consummate wisdom, to answer the gracious designs, and fulfil the promise of God, in the appointed time ; yet at present we cannot possibly see their subserviency to that end. We firmly believe

(1) 2 Theff. ii. 3.

that "righteousness and truth always go before
"his face;" yet we find in this, and many other
particulars, that "clouds and darkness are round
"about his throne."^(u)

Should any imagine, that an objection may be
formed from hence, against the scriptures as a
revelation from God, it may be sufficient to an-
swer, that were we to set aside these instances
from the sacred volume, the matter of fact still
remains the same, confirmed by every day's ex-
perience, and necessarily arises from the nature
of God and man. Admit that God governs the
world, and the consequence immediately follows,
that it is impossible for us to know all the rea-
sons of his proceedings: Let this therefore satisfy
your minds, for the present, till we have oppor-
tunity of illustrating this thought more at large.

In the mean time, may you entertain that re-
verence for God, and that modest sense of your
limits, as creatures, that may prepare you to re-
sume the meditation with greater advantage!

(u) Psalm xcvi. 2.



S E R M O N IV.

THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO BE EXPLAINED HEREAFTER.

Preached JAN. 27th, 1771.

J O H N XIII. 7.

JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, WHAT I DO THOU KNOWEST NOT NOW, BUT THOU SHALT KNOW HEREAFTER.

IN the close of the preceding discourse it was observed, that if we admit that God governs the world, it will necessarily follow, that it is impossible for us to know all the reasons of his proceedings.

While God is infinite, and we are finite—while he is wise, and we are ignorant—while he is omniscient, and we are short-sighted—the reasons of his dispensations must be frequently out of our reach: This I say is a necessary consequence of the infinite perfection of the divine nature. “Can’st thou by searching find out
“God? Can’st thou find out the Almighty to
H “per-

“ perfection ? ” (a) That being who has an eternal and necessary existence, and therefore, must possess absolute perfection, certainly cannot be measured by the limited minds of his creatures, and they are as little able to determine what such a being can do, or what is fit for him to do, as they are to comprehend the manner of his existence. This is applicable to all created beings : For though creatures of larger capacities may know more of God and his ways than we at present do, and there may be for ever an increasing nearness to God, in the blessed inhabitants of heaven, as God is pleased to discover himself to them ; yet after the highest possible advances of a creature towards what is divine, there is still a limitedness in the very nature of a created being, by which it falls infinitely short of the uncreated and independent God. Must it not then be supposed, that there are depths of counsel and design, of reasons and views, in the ways and proceedings of God, that are unfathomable by our line ?

And as the divine nature is unsearchable, so the extent of his government, reaches far beyond our view. We act in a very narrow sphere, and so do all creatures, in comparison of the comprehensive government of God. He may indeed promote some of his creatures to a very extensive charge, who may be able to take into their view many worlds, and may be employed in various and distant parts of the divine

(a) Job. xi. 7.

dominions;

dominions; yet the operations of an instrument, and the observations of the highest creature, must be very confined, in comparison of the universal agency and providence of God, over all his works.

God has a vast dominion, and we do wrong, and fall into many hurtful mistakes, when we conceive of the divine dispensations by their effects upon us, or our world alone. God has a universe under his care, and his government concerns itself, not only with every individual, but with the whole as connected together; The most minute events have a reference to the general plan, and the good of the whole. It must therefore necessarily be, that, as we see but few, very few, of the objects and interests that fall under his care, we can know but little of the plan upon which he proceeds—can enter but little into the complicated reasons of many of his dispensations—can scarcely guess at the designs carrying on, and form a poor judgment of the wisdom of what he is doing. This must be the necessary consequence of his extensive government, was it possible to connect such a government with an understanding, not superior to our own.

But, “his understanding is infinite.”^(b) He has one intire view of his own creation, comprehending every creature, and every circumstance in it: He takes in all times in one view, and has them ever present to his infinite mind:

(b) Psalm cxlvii. 5.

“ perfection ? ” (a) That being who has an eternal and necessary existence, and therefore, must possess absolute perfection, certainly cannot be measured by the limited minds of his creatures, and they are as little able to determine what such a being can do, or what is fit for him to do, as they are to comprehend the manner of his existence. This is applicable to all created beings : For though creatures of larger capacities may know more of God and his ways than we at present do, and there may be for ever an increasing nearness to God, in the blessed inhabitants of heaven, as God is pleased to discover himself to them ; yet after the highest possible advances of a creature towards what is divine, there is still a limitedness in the very nature of a created being, by which it falls infinitely short of the uncreated and independent God. Must it not then be supposed, that there are depths of counsel and design, of reasons and views, in the ways and proceedings of God, that are unfathomable by our line ?

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(b) Psalm cxlvii. 5.

He sees therefore the connection of every event, with all its future and remotest consequences.

How then is it possible for us to understand all the reasons he may have for proceedings that bring present pain and distress upon us? For, besides all that we see, he has a perfect intuition into the nature and circumstances of all that will be affected by us, now and hereafter, and therefore forms his conduct upon this view of all creatures, and all times. That is the reason why "his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." (c) Though we may add

That God does sometimes purposely conceal the reasons of his proceedings from his creatures.

"It is not for you," says our Lord to his inquisitive disciples, "to know the times or the seasons, which the father hath put in his own power :"(d) "It is not proper for you; not for your good—none of your right."—"He gives no account of his matters to any of his servants ;"(e) *i. e.* he has no need to do it—he is under no obligation to it : So that when he does condescend to explain any of his ways to us, it is of mere sovereign grace.

Not Gabriel asks the reason why,
Nor God the reason gives ;
Nor dares the favourite angel pry
Between the folded leaves.

WATTS.

It is his prerogative and his glory, to rule without account. If earthly governors, and those so

(c) Rom. xi. 33. (d) Acts i. 7. (e) Job xxxiii. 13.

low as parents and masters, think they have a right to direct their dependents, without being obliged to give the reasons for what they do ; is not this much more the right of God, who is the absolute Lord of all ? And besides this, there is a glory that belongs to the divine government. It belongs to him alone to rule the world, because he alone is equal to it ; and this must be known and acknowledged to the glory of God, that there are reasons and views in the divine government, which no creature can fathom, which therefore must, and may safely be left to him, without account. This equally affects every creature, in the highest state of perfection to which a finite being can attain : But for us, our ability of judging concerning the ways of God, is, in many respects, peculiarly defective. It is true, the human mind has a glorious distinction above any of the works of God on earth, in its intellectual powers : But in comparison with angelic beings, we must surely lower that conceit of ourselves we are too ready to indulge, and acknowledge, that it is not for us who have so many orders of being above us, to think of diving into all the deep counsels of God.

What do we know of the real state of the world about us ? only what our eyes and our ears tell us. We judge of things by their appearance : We see hardly any thing as it is. The surface is our object, the internal nature, and influence of things, we know little or nothing of.

The

The most familiar object, in this respect, puzzles and confounds us : How much more the heart of man—the thoughts and designs of many men—and the effect of their designs ! And if a single object is too large a whole for our view, what shall we do with families—with nations ! What can we know of the complicated circumstances and interests of many nations ! We cannot look a moment into futurity—do not know what will be the first consequence of any one event.

And indeed what we call our knowledge, is, a great deal of it, little more than prejudice. Such notions and apprehensions of things as we have taken in from infancy, by education, by custom, from the false maxims and depraved notions of the world : For there is certainly a moral prejudice, and depravity of mind, that most of all perverts our judgment concerning God, and his ways. The irregularity of our appetites, passions, and affections, brings a thousand disorders into our minds : They have gained an undue ascendancy—command the understanding—present objects to us in false colours—and dictate our judgment concerning them. How is it possible, therefore, but that the ways of God, the proceedings of a being of perfect knowledge and wisdom, in the management of the universe, formed upon a view of all things and times, as they really are and will be, should be unsearchable to such minds as ours—
minds.

minds so much under the controul of our passions, and our senses!

Yet, "vain man would fain be wise, though
"born like the wild asses colt,"(f) yet "he
"would be wise," not eager in the pursuit of
knowledge, but, proud of his wisdom. This pride
of the understanding was, perhaps, the first sin
that possessed the human mind. "Ye shall be as
"gods, to know good and evil,"(g) was the
temptation that prevailed with the happy pair in
paradise, to their sin and ruin: It is no wonder,
therefore, it should have been peculiarly predo-
minant in their posterity, ever since, and be the
last and hardest sin to subdue in renewed minds.

We have indeed a customary way of confessing
our ignorance: But, at the same time, we think
ourselves wise, and have the highest conceit of
our wisdom, there too where we are most of all
deficient, viz. in judging of the equity or wis-
dom of the divine proceedings. This foolish
presumption is the very thing that leads us into
farther error: For though we this moment con-
fess our ignorance, yet, the very next, if any
thing turns up disagreeable or unaccountable,
we call God to our bar, and pass our sentence
upon his proceeding, as though it was some-
thing strange, that ought to be accounted for.
The first and most obvious reason, viz. that we
are sinners, does not satisfy us; we must have
some peculiar reason why we are distinguished
from others by affliction, and we conceit that we

(f) Job. xi. 12.

(g) Gen. iii. 5.

have both a right and capacity to judge of this. We follow this *ignis fatuus* of our own pride, till we bewilder and perplex ourselves, beyond patience—plunge deep into the abyſs of providence, and are loſt. Our own ſin corrects us, and inſtead of unravelling the myſteries of providence, we only wrap ourſelves up in clouds of our own forming. Nor is it to be wondered at, that God ſhould ſometimes directly chaſtiſe this arrogance, by adding to the myſteriouſneſs of his providences, till “we walk in darkneſs, and, “ſee no light.”^(b) This ſometimes brings us to our right mind, learns us to depend intirely on the divine wiſdom and care, and wait for the light of heaven to explain what is now inexplicable. “What I do thou knoweſt not now, “but thou ſhalt know hereafter.” “Hereafter”—We may expect it, as one of the bleſſings of the heavenly ſtate, that what is now painful and myſterious, will be then explained to our ſatisfaction and joy: But we muſt wait till then. It is not to be expected, that a child, in a courſe of education, ſhould fully enter into the reaſon and uſe of all that diſcipline he goes through, and though, in general, the neceſſity and importance of it, may be frequently repreſented to him, he will never thoroughly underſtand it, till he ſees the advantage of it in future life: Thus it is with us. The diſpenſations of providence that moſt pain and perplex us now, have a reference to the world to come, and iſſue in that, and

(b) Iſa. l. 10.

therefore

therefore till we see how all things wind up, we have but a partial view of their connection, and discern but little of their beauty and use. But the day is coming that shall explain it all, "the day of revelation of the righteous judgment of God."⁽ⁱ⁾ There must be such a day, for the vindication of the divine providence, as well as to adjudge the characters and final states of men: For indeed the dispensations of providence must be brought into view, in order to determine the characters of men, which depends upon their behaviour in the circumstances in which the Lord of all has placed them. Here then will be a grand, and a minute review, of the whole scheme of providential government!

And, upon the whole, both heaven and earth shall declare the righteousness of God—the equity, wisdom and goodness, of all his ways towards the children of men. And then, christians, you will not only see things in a new light, but with other eyes; you will then be able to bear the glorious discovery, which at present would be altogether improper for you, and overwhelm you. We cannot in this respect, conceive at present, what we shall be. Our powers will be enlarged, and our present weaknesses overcome; the sinful disorders of our minds, the unruly passions, sensual appetites, and vicious inclinations, which so often mislead and impose upon us, will be cured; the prejudices that arise from present connections, the interests of time, the influence of sense, or

(i) Rom. ii. 5.

our partial views of things, the prejudices of education or custom will then vanish at once : And as not our own, so neither will the passions or prejudices of others, then blind our minds, and deceive us, as they often do at present ; rather, the society of heaven will enlarge our views, refine our sentiments, improve our intellectual powers, teach us a better way of thinking, and make a thousand delightful discoveries to us. Those benevolent ministring spirits, who now attend us as the instruments of providence, then our associates in the joys and services of heaven, will have many pleasing histories to relate of the events of time, and of their services for us : This will throw new light on the schemes of providence, open our eyes to many of our present errors, and the causes of them, and give us occasion to admire the conduct of divine wisdom, and love towards us.

You will then also, christians, stand upon higher ground, have a larger prospect of the divine works. The past period of mortality will appear to view in its connection. It is experience that makes us wise. We always best understand what is past, and frequently see reason, upon a review, to say, “ It was good for us that “ we were afflicted : ” (k) When, therefore, you come to look over, by the light of heaven, the finished plan of providence, and see it all filled up and executed, how will it raise your admiration, and improve your joy ! you will have no-

(k) Psalm cxix. 71.

thing to guess at, nothing to fear. The uncertainties, the surmises, the conjectures, the alarms of mortality, about future consequences, will be over. You will enjoy the blissful event to which all was directed, and then best understand how all worked together for good: You may therefore expect the mystery of providence will be unfolded hereafter, when you are able to bear it. And to this you may add,

We have a promise for it. I do not here insist upon that in the text; though it might, I think, be safely thus applied, and such a conclusion be justly drawn from it;—there can, however, be no doubt but that this is included at least, in that perfection of knowledge St. Paul ascribes to the heavenly state. At present “we know in part, and we prophecy in part, but, when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away: For now, we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face, now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known.” (1) If St. Paul is supposed here to intend God himself, for the object of this perfect knowledge, it must be understood of God revealed in Christ, (for the divine essence cannot be the object of observation) God revealed in the works of redemption, and in the proceedings of his providence, which are under the direction of Christ, for the salvation of men. When therefore you see Jesus face to face, when

(1) 1 Cor. xiii. 9. 10. 12.

the clouds and darkness that now surround his throne, are dissipated, all the intricacies of his providence will be explained, and appear to be the methods of his love.

And this, christians, you may depend upon: It is not probable conjecture, but the assurance of faith. What you know not now, you shall know hereafter, not only to your satisfaction, but to your exceeding joy. To see God, is to enjoy him. The joys of heaven are pure intellectual joys. When therefore you behold, in the light of his presence, all that glory of the divine perfections, that will shine forth in the administration of his providence towards you, on earth, it will greatly contribute to your perfect delight and blessedness in him.

Many other arguments might be formed, from various topicks, to confirm this pleasing expectation; but I must wave them now, and proceed to the application of the subject.

Enough I think has been said, to raise our esteem and veneration of the divine government.

It is not you see any irregularity in his proceedings that makes them mysterious to us, but, on the contrary, because they are directed by a knowledge and wisdom that is quite out of our reach, and it is that wisdom we adore, when we least understand the design of these events that are directed by it.

That veneration therefore we owe to the divine government, is not that disgraceful thing

men call ignorant astonishment; or at least, here it is not disgraceful: it is, on the contrary, an argument of improved and superior understanding.

For the more just our notions are of God and ourselves, of our present and future state, the more profoundly shall we venerate and adore the wisdom that governs all things, and which we cannot comprehend. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (m)

But must we satisfy ourselves with this? Does the subject call for nothing more from us, than to entertain venerable thoughts of the divine government? Does it not also fairly conclude, that there is nothing more becoming in us; nothing better for us, than to surrender ourselves into his hands, and leave him to take what course he thinks proper with us?

This we all indeed profess to do; but then it seems commonly with this proviso, that he should do nothing concerning us, but what we can understand, and see the fitness of; because when it is otherwise, we complain as though it was strange, that God should deal thus with us. — This would be for God to be directed by our understanding, instead of our submitting to his wisdom. And is this fit? Is it fit that God should have the care of us, and be engaged to do us good, and yet not be guided by his own in-

(m) Rom. xi. 33.

finite wisdom; but take our advice therein, and consult our humour? Is it not much more fit, in every view, that we should resign and submit ourselves to him? This is certainly most becoming in us, and best for us too. It is what God will claim as his right. If he has the care of us, (and certainly we would not wish he should resign his care) it is his right to direct his care, by his own counsels, and not ours. And sure, I am, it is best for us. For, since we see nothing before us, it is better to be led through this darkness, by an infinitely wise and omniscient being, who has all things under his view, than to be left alone, or amidst an erring multitude, of whom there is not one who knows, where his next step will terminate. “But God is light, in him is no darkness at all;”(n) perfect knowledge, and perfect love. And may we not be satisfied with this, not only that such a being has the direction of all that concerns us, but that he has engaged himself, “that all things shall work together for good?”(o) If he tells us that, though we cannot understand all the reasons of his conduct, he will answer for it, that good shall come by all—that he is doing nothing but what he knows will be best—and that he will make it appear so to us hereafter: surely this is enough not merely to satisfy us, but to make us thankful and joyful too.

Especially, when you consider, christians, that this all-wise and gracious being condescends to

(n) 1 John i. 5. (o) Rom. viii. 28.

call himself your father. It is true all things are under the direction of a sovereign power above you, the very idea of which is awful. You cannot see the secret springs and wheels by which things are guided, and this, you say, naturally creates anxiety and fear. What! when the supreme director is your heavenly father? The relation itself implies care and love, on his part, submission and confidence, in his children.

And, to improve this confidence, and increase your consolation thereby, God has committed these your present, as well as your eternal interests, to the care of his son, your friend and redeemer. If this will not persuade your hearts to confidence, if this will not inspire you with joy, I know of nothing that can. You frequently adopt the language of St. Paul with pleasure, "I know whom I have believed, and "I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that "which I have committed unto him, against "that day:"(p) And can you not trust your present interests, in the same hands to which you have committed your immortal all?

If you cannot, it is your sin, and ought greatly to shame and grieve you.—Your sighs acknowledge this.

Well may we sigh indeed,—that such pride should dwell with so much ignorance—that we should thus dishonour God—discredit the power, wisdom, love, and faithfulness, of the great redeemer—that we should be so much more anxious

(p) 2 Tim., 1. 12.

for

for time than eternity—so ready to credit every false alarm, and so hard to receive the consolations of God—so forward to sit in judgment upon the ways of infinite wisdom, and yet so blind to the most obvious design of all his dispensations.

If, christians, you are really grieved for this—if you sigh, not from discontent, but from the conviction of your own sin and folly, it is well. Such a conviction may be of important service to you, if indulged, and allowed to have its due effect upon your minds : You will then in good earnest set yourselves to correct these disorders of your minds, and readily receive any assistance therein.

Attend then to the following directions with which I close this discourse.

First, when you find your minds perplexed with the mysteries of providence, call your thoughts to an immediate attention to what is more plain and obvious. What is the plain design of God in such afflictive providences ?

This you may easily understand by looking into his word, and examining the state of your own minds. You cannot look far, before you see, in very legible characters, how you ought to behave yourselves towards God, under his corrections ; what is your present duty, and to what advantage you may improve your afflictions. And if you are once in good earnest taken up with these things, the mystery of providence will not much disturb you. Or, if you find

find this impracticable—if while you think at all of your present afflictions (and you can not but think of them while you feel them) what is most painful and mysterious in them will be uppermost, then

Secondly, refer that mystery to the day of revelation.

Go with your complaint to God, tell him (as you freely may) all your difficulty, and thus enter your case as it were upon record in heaven, to be explained another day : Not forgetting to be thankful you have a promise that it shall ; and shall be explained so as to appear worthy of God, and therefore to your satisfaction and joy. But, if such is the weakness of your faith, that you cannot enough realize this distant hope, and the present burden is too heavy upon you to attempt, what you think, so towering a flight,

Then, Finally, think, (and surely you cannot refuse to think) of the greater mysteries of redemption.

I say the greater mysteries of redemption : For truly, after all, what is there to wonder at, in the conduct of providence towards us, except it be the excellency of the divine administration, which is indeed a just object of wonder, and the daily mercies we receive, which may indeed justly astonish us ? Here, it is true, there is something that wants to be accounted for : That creatures so very guilty, should be the objects of God's constant and most indulgent care, and enriched with an almost infinite variety of daily

blessings from his bounty ! Yes, Sirs, there is really much more to wonder at, in every mercy you receive, than in all the afflictions of your lives. There is no difficulty at all to understand that sin is the cause of sorrow—that sinners should be corrected by a holy God—the question is, why are they not destroyed ?

It is true, you have learned to answer this question from the gospel of Jesus : But you have learned there too, that there are “ heights and “ depths, lengths, and breadths,” in that revelation of divine love, “ that pass all understanding.”(q). Your present mercies are the least fruits of that love. He “ has given you his “ son, and with him freely gives you all “ things.”(r) Here, is your redemption from hell ! To this you owe your life, your daily bread, and the hopes of eternal life. When therefore your minds are pained by the dispensations of providence, apply to these consolations. Here indeed you will be as little able to search out the deep things of God, as in his present dispensations : But it is better to be lost in pleasing wonder at the riches of his grace, than to fret ourselves with pride and discontent, at the inscrutable secrets of his government.

(q) Eph. iii. 18. 19. (r) Rom. viii. 32.

S E R-



S E R M O N V.

GOD CORRECTS, YET PARDONS HIS
PEOPLE.

Preached DEC. 11th, 1768.

P S A L M XCIX. 8.

THOU ANSWEREST THEM, O LORD OUR GOD :
THOU WAST A GOD THAT FORGAVEST
THEM, THOUGH THOU TOOKEST VENGEANCE
OF THEIR INVENTIONS.

GOD, every where in his word, represents himself under the character of a father, who corrects his children out of love : Yet it is no uncommon thing, to hear christians complain of their afflictions, as tokens of God's displeasure, and as a ground of fear with respect to their acceptance with him. This is a very hurtful mistake ; hurtful to themselves, injurious to their God. The words now read are very proper to correct that mistake, and teach us how to conceive of the divine dispensations towards us : A subject of very great importance to persons, who must own themselves guilty before God, and who live in a world in which

sufferings are so great a part of their appointed portion. We greatly need correction, and we must expect it: and as we are “not to despise “the chastening of the Lord,” so “neither “should we faint under his rebukes:”(a) Let us then endeavour to improve this passage, for our instruction on this important head.

The words immediately relate to God's ancient dispensations towards the Israelites. Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, are mentioned in the sixth verse, as persons whose intercession God remarkably honoured, “they called upon the Lord, and “he answered them;” and to this the text refers. It was in answer to their intercession, that when God was provoked with this people, he still “forgave” their sins, “though he took vengeance “on their inventions.” It may be proper to take notice of a few instances of this, in their history; which will illustrate the text. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the people made and worshipped the golden calf.(b) God informed Moses of this, while he was yet in the mount, and said to him—“I have seen this people, and behold “it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let “me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against “them, and that I may consume them, and I “will make of thee a great nation:” Upon this Moses intercedes with God for them, pleading what God had already done for this people—the occasion that would be given, by their destruction, to the enemy to blaspheme the name of

(a) Heb. xii. 5. (b) Exod. xxxii. 9.—14.

God—but especially pleading the promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, concerning their posterity : Upon which it is said, “ the Lord repented of the evil which he “ thought to do unto his people.” Yet after this we are told, (c) “ the Lord plagued the “ people, because they made the calf.” “ He “ took vengeance on their inventions,” but, “ forgave” their sin. Again,

At the report of the spies, concerning the land of promise, the people murmured against God, as well as against Moses, and were for making a captain, and returning to Egypt. “ And the Lord said unto Moses, how long “ will this people provoke me ? and how long “ will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs “ which I have shewed among them ? I will “ smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit “ them, and will make of thee a greater nation, “ and mightier than they.” (d) Moses again intercedes for them, pleading largely with God that glorious name of mercy, by which he had lately made himself known ; “ and now I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, “ according as thou hast spoken, saying, The “ Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, “ forgiving iniquity and transgression ; pardon “ I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and “ as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt, “ even until now. And the Lord said, I have

(c) Ver. 35: (d) Numb. xiv. 11, 12.

“ pardoned

" pardoned according to thy word : But, as for
 " all those men which have seen my glory, and
 " my miracles, which I did in Egypt, and in
 " the wilderness, and have tempted me now
 " these ten times, and have not hearkened to
 " my voice ; surely, they shall not see the land
 " which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall
 " any of them which provoked me see it—but
 " your little ones, which ye said should be a
 " prey, them will I bring in, and they shall
 " know the land which ye have despised. But
 " as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in
 " this wilderness." (e) Here you see judgment
 and mercy mingled together. Thus also upon
 the rebellion of Korah and his company, when
 the earth opened and swallowed them up, and
 fire from the Lord destroyed two hundred and
 fifty men, " the whole congregation murmured
 " against Moses and Aaron, saying, ye have
 " killed the people of the Lord : " (f) " And
 " the Lord said unto Moses, get you up from
 " among this congregation, that I may consume
 " them as in a moment." But these holy men
 again interceded for a rebellious people : " They
 " fell on their faces," to deprecate his displea-
 sure. The plague was already begun amongst
 the people : Moses directs Aaron, what he should
 do to make atonement for them, and he ac-
 cordingly goes with his censer, and stands be-
 tween the living and the dead, and the plague
 was stayed. But there were " fourteen thou-

(e) Ver. 17.—22. 31. 32. (f) Numb. xvi. 41.

“saw seven hundred already dead.”(g) In so awful a manner did God correct—yet so ready to forgive. I will refer you but to one more instance:—When the Israelites were plagued with the fiery serpents, by which many of them died, they came to Moses, and say, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee, pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us: and Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.”(h)—This instance not only exhibits the divine compassion, and his readiness to forgive these repenting sinners, but, is typical of the atonement and intercession of Jesus,(i) “through whom God is reconciling sinners to himself,”(k) and in whom his pardoning mercy is most gloriously revealed.

From this view of the words, and the history to which they refer, we may take occasion for farther meditation upon them, under the following observations:

I. That God may have many wise and gracious purposes to serve, in correcting the sins of his people, by present and temporal afflictions, though he forgives them.

II. These corrections may sometimes be so awful, that God seems to be taking vengeance, and

(g) Ver. 44.—50. (h) Numb. xxi. 1.—8. (i) John iii. 14.

(k) 2 Cor. v. 19.

his people are ready to look upon their afflictions as tokens of his wrath. But,

III. This is a mistaken judgment : For God may correct in mercy, and in order to save.

IV. The reason why we are only corrected, when we might be destroyed, is, because we have an intercessor who prevails with God, and for whose sake he is merciful to us.

I. Let us observe, that the blessed God may have many wise and gracious purposes to serve, in correcting the sins of his people, by present and temporal afflictions, though he forgives them. It does indeed much illustrate his fatherly and gracious care over them—in a peculiar manner displays his holiness, and is thereby an admonition to the world—and is a means to humble and warn his people for the future. Each of these are important ends. Many others might be mentioned ; but these are sufficient to show, how wise and gracious the divine dispensations are, even when most afflictive. And this is my maxim, when attempting to vindicate the ways of God, to aim at nothing more, than to discover such ends and designs carrying on thereby, as are worthy of God. If I cannot discover this, I take refuge in the perfections of his nature, by which I am assured, he can do nothing wrong. But I think we need not here be driven to this, since the particulars I have now mentioned, express both the wisdom and goodness of God.

(1.) Then

(1.) Then, I say, when God corrects his people, it greatly illustrates his care over them, and corresponds with that paternal relation in which he stands to them.

God is not only reconciled to believing sinners in Christ, but he receives them as his children. They are taught to call him their father in heaven; and for this purpose he gives them the spirit of his son. But, must he therefore never correct their faults, because he is their father? Does he ever proceed in that manner? Or is it fit he should? Are not these creatures, whom he has graciously taken into such a relation to himself, very much disordered and degenerated in their minds? Do they not therefore need abundance of watchful care, and fatherly correction? And is it not therefore an argument of his most perfect paternal regards, that he thus concerns himself about the temper and behaviour of his children, and chastises their faults? They are chosen out of the world, set apart for himself, and to be a peculiar people; they must not therefore indulge the spirit and conduct of the world about them, nor will God suffer it. When their temper and behaviour is unsuitable to their relation to him, it is his part, and will be his care, as their father, to correct it. It is an high and holy calling, to which they are advanced, a great and glorious state, for which they are designed; and vast care and cultivation must be bestowed upon them, to form them to any fitness for such a

state. It is to this end God uses this discipline of his rod : He would not otherwise act the part of a father ; “ for if ye were without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then were ye “ bastards, and not sons : But, if ye endure “ chastening, God dealeth with you as with “ sons.”^(l)

(2.) The more severe and extraordinary sufferings that good men sometimes meet with in the world, in a peculiar manner display the holiness of God, and his displeasure against sin ; and thereby afford a very awakening admonition to the world.

There are indeed, in the common and general course of providence, many alarms given to a careless world : But, still, “ because” final “ judgment is not immediately executed against “ their evil works, therefore, the heart of the “ sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”^(m) While they have any respite, however alarmed, they still harden themselves in their sins, and seem to “ think God is altogether such a one as “ themselves.”⁽ⁿ⁾ Men are, in general, but little sensible of the infinite purity of the divine nature, the strict regard he has to his law, and the dreadful evil of sin. God is indeed, as I said just now, daily teaching men these lessons by his providence, and in nothing more than by the afflictions of good men. Behold indeed the goodness, but see also the awful severity of God ! — He cannot bear sin in those he loves. What-

(l) Heb. xii. 7. 8. (m) Eccl. viii. 21. (n) Psal. l. 21.

ever be their attainments of character, he yet sees their infirmities and corrects them—He remarks their sins, and “takes vengeance of their inventions.” And is this not a very loud admonition to the world? “If judgment thus begin at the house of God, what must the end be of those who obey not the gospel?”^(s) “If through much tribulation the children of God enter into the kingdom?”^(p) “If the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”^(q) “If these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”^(r) If God thus ~~de~~ fully corrects the most eminent saints, and his beloved sons, what can impenitent sinners expect? If Israel was thus chastened, what could the idolatrous nations of Canaan expect, but to be destroyed?

(3.) The afflictions of God’s people are designed to humble them, and make them more watchful for the future.

God awakens them thereby from their secure, insensible, and indolent state. When the Israelites were corrected, they presently see the evil of what they had done, and cry out, “We have sinned.” And this is God’s design; to hide pride from man. Divine favours soon make us proud. While we are at ease in prosperity, we are little sensible of the iniquity there is within us, of the enormity of many things, into which

(s) 1 Pet. iv. 17. (p) Acts. xiv. 22. (q) 1 Pet. iv. 18.

(r) Luke xxiii. 31.

the customs of the world ensnare us. Afflictions open our eyes. God hereby sets our iniquities before us, and makes us possess them in their bitter fruits, makes us feel that we are guilty, and teaches us to adopt the language of Job, when God was contending with him—"Behold! "I am vile, what shall I answer thee?"^(s) That language is indeed common with us, we use it, sometimes with very little meaning, and still less of the sentiment and temper it ought to express. You see in the character of that holy man, how hard it is to bring us to this. He was ever ready to confess himself a sinner before God: But the just and necessary defence of his character from the false and groundless charge of hypocrisy, that his acquaintance brought against him, kept him off too much from those humbling views of himself, which God intended to bring him to, till he hears the voice of God himself in the whirlwind, and then he cries out, "Behold! I am vile—once have I spoken, yea, twice, but "I will proceed no further." And in something like this manner does God frequently proceed with us, that he may bring us off from our forms, and force from our hearts the full meaning of our too customary confessions.

To this end he sets himself against our sins, so as to make us taste deep "of the wormwood "and the gall,"^(t) that we may thereby feel, and therefore fear the evil of sin.

^(s) Job xl. 4.

^(t) Lam. iii. 19.

For such wise and gracious purposes may God think proper to correct his people, even though he pardons their sins. And

II. These corrections may sometimes be so severe, that God seems to be "taking vengeance," and his people are ready to look upon their afflictions as tokens of his wrath.

You have seen this in the examples to which the text refers. What large measures did God pour out upon that people from "the cup of trembling!"^(u)—How awful was the plague!—the fiery serpents! and the divine decree, that the murmurers should never enter into the promised land! Yea, how awful to Moses himself, who was also forbid to enter! Notwithstanding many earnest prayers for that blessing, he that had so often prevailed, in his intercessions for the rebellious people, was in that denied. Though honoured by converse with God, "face to face," above all men, yet for his infirmity at the waters of strife, he even dies under a cloud, and with the marks of his sin in his death. This often lay heavy upon his heart, and greatly discouraged him. He complains of it, in the tenderest manner, both to God and the people, "The Lord was angry with me," says the dejected Prince, "for your sakes."^(w)

How often does Job, that upright man, under the weight of his affliction, seem to apprehend God was pouring out all his wrath upon him as an enemy! "Thou huntest me as a

(u) Isaiah li. 17. (w) Deut. i. 37.

"fierce

“ fierce lion, and again thou shewest thyself
 “ marvellous upon me.”(x) “ Wherefore hidest
 “ thou thy face, and holdest me for thine ene-
 “ my ?”(y) “ I cry unto thee, and thou dost
 “ not hear me—thou art become cruel to me—
 “ with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself
 “ against me.”(z) And thus the Psalmist was
 too ready to conclude many times, that “ God
 “ had cast him off—that his mercy was clean
 “ gone—that he had forgotten to be gracious,
 “ and would be merciful no more.”(a) Such
 language as this is not to be understood as
 charging God with any injustice. Nothing
 could be farther from the thoughts of these pi-
 ous men: They only express their painful fears
 of God’s just displeasure and wrath against them.
 Even these distressing fears, though they may
 generally arise from some guilty weakness, may
 yet be of important use in such imperfect charac-
 ters. God may therefore order his providences
 so as purposely to awaken them, thereby more
 effectually to humble, and enhance the value of
 forgiving mercy. The afflicted mourner cannot
 indeed see the mercy designed: He therefore
 meditates terror, and suffers, perhaps, all but
 despair. This is his infirmity, and on many
 accounts sinful, yet it is too often the case. This
 leads us to the

IIIId. Observation, That these discouraging
 apprehensions of the wrath of God, under great

(x). Job x. 16. (y) Ibid xiii. 24. (z) Ib. xxx. 20. 21.

(a) Psalm lxxvii. 7, 8. 9.

and awful afflictions, are founded upon a mistaken judgment : For God may "take vengeance" on our sins, and yet intend nothing but mercy to us thereby.

The methods of his love are, to condemn sin, and yet save the sinner. This was the design for which he sent his son into the world, in whose sufferings all the terrors of God against sin appear : Yet here he has most of all discovered the riches of his mercy towards guilty and miserable men. It is the same in all his providential dispensations. It is his compassion to our souls, that leads him to correct our sins, and the more awful his dispensations are, by which he visits for our iniquities in this world, the more earnest he therein appears to be for our happiness in the world to come. St. Paul well understood this, and therefore fainted not under the severest trials, "For our light affliction," says he, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (b) "But the Apostle" you say, "speaks here only of light afflictions, such as might well be understood to be fatherly corrections." It is true he calls them "light," but you would not call them so, were you called out to bear them, nor were they so, in themselves. It is only in a comparative view that he speaks of them, in this manner : When he considered "the eternal weight of glory," the present afflictions appeared "light" and momentary, and, considered

(b) 2 Cor. iv. 17.

as means of preparing him for that glory, he was reconciled to them, and joyful under them :
 “ We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ;
 “ persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but
 “ not destroyed ; always bearing about in the
 “ body the dying of the Lord Jesus—always
 “ delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake—yet, we
 “ faint not ; for though the outward man perish,
 “ the inward man is renewed day by day.” (c)
 Should you say, “ St. Paul could not look upon
 “ those persecutions and distresses he suffered for
 “ Christ’s sake as judgments, nor indeed as corrections, but, as far as they affected him, they
 “ were only trials of his fidelity and zeal in his
 “ master’s cause, which, being approved, would
 “ increase his reward.” Under this consideration then, would you be willing to suffer all the
 Apostle did ? But are you not willing too that
 God should chuse the kind as well as the measure of your afflictions ? And if he takes such
 a method with you as makes you deeply feel,
 and smart severely for your sins and follies, must
 you immediately fly in his face ; give the lie to
 his word ; and assert, “ this can never be in
 “ mercy ?” O shame to the name of christians !
 What wonder if he still go on with us in such a
 case, to add wound to wound, till the pride of
 that spirit is brought down,—till we are glad to
 acknowledge the mercy that corrects us, and
 fly to that as our only relief ! This, I believe,

(c) Ib. 8.—16.

is not unfrequently the case. Yes, Sirs, ever remember this difference between the present and the future state; this is a state of discipline, that of retribution: It is only in hell God takes vengeance on sin, without hope. All providential corrections, not only may consist with mercy, but are mercifully designed as means of salvation. And observe in the

IVth place, That the reason why God only corrects us for our sins, and does not destroy us, as we have deserved, is, because we have a powerful intercessor, for whose sake he has mercy upon us.

You have seen this illustrated in the intercession of Moses and Aaron for the Israelites: For therein they typified the intercession of Jesus, who is both a prince and a saviour, "an high priest upon his throne."^(d) "Having entered into the holiest of all with his own blood, he there appears before God for us."^(e) He appears "as a lamb that had been slain,"^(f) and upon that, pleads with God, for the forfeited lives of sinners. The brazen serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness, by the direction of God, that those who were bitten by the serpents might look to it and live, our Lord expressly applies to himself, and his being lifted up on the cross, as the appointed means of life to dying sinners.^(g) "He thus bore the sins of many, and makes intercession for the transgres-

(d) Zech. vi. 13. (e) Heb. ix. 12, 24. (f) Rev. v. 6.

(g) John iii. 14, 15.

“fors.”(b) Here then, christians, you see your hope. God corrects you : It is fit he should. But why are you not destroyed ? He mingles judgments with our mercies : But why have we not “ judgment without mercy ? ” (i) It is this “ blood of sprinkling ” (k) that saves us from the destroying sword. It is the intercessor Jesus who prevails, to reverse the sentence gone forth against us as sinners, and turn the curse into a blessing : For though God does still, and ever must, express his displeasure against sin, yet for Jesus sake, we are only corrected, where we deserve to be destroyed.

In the close of this subject let these thoughts sink deep into your minds.

(1.) See to it, that all your afflictions answer God’s gracious design in them.

The end of all is, “ to take away sin,” (l) and therefore to humble you for it. Don’t therefore go away with mistaken notions of this discourse and say, “ God sees no sin in his people, and is never angry with them.”—I tell you again, he “ takes vengeance ” for your sins, that he may have mercy on your souls. You cannot therefore have too much sensibility and tenderness in your consciences ; you cannot “ humble yourselves ” too much “ under the mighty hand of God,” (m) in the views of your sinfulness. This is very different from despairing terror,—from distressing fretfulness and discontent. When

(b) Isa. liii. 12. (i) Jam. ii. 13. (k) Heb. xii. 24.

(l) Isa. xxvii. 9. (m) 1 Pet. v. 6.

God sets himself to humble us, we should fall under his stroke. Mourn we may—we ought—Not complain of God, but, lament our vileness, and so justify him. We should labour for this—for a heart that mourns more for sin, than for sufferings. Yet,

(2.) Under your deepest distress still honour God, by hope in his promised mercy—honour your high priest, by faith in his atonement and intercession. Let your God “take vengeance” on your sins—yet rejoice in the riches of that grace, which “blots out all these iniquities,” which “for his name,” and his son’s “sake,” pardons all these sins,⁽ⁿ⁾

Happy souls! that know how thus to submit to the corrections, and yet rejoice in the mercy of a forgiving God.

Finally, let impenitent sinners see the awful and dangerous circumstances in which they stand.

If even the fatherly chastisements of God’s hand, in this world, are so awful, what will be the full vial of his wrath upon sinners, in the last day?

—Believe it, Sirs, he has other judgments, another kind of vengeance, for the impenitent and unbelieving world. For “the Lord himself “shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire, “taking vengeance on them that know not God, “and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus “Christ.”^(o) May this thought suitably possess your minds, and engage you “to fly from “the wrath to come!”^(p) Amen!

(n) Isaiah xliii. 25. (o) 2 Theff. i. 7. 8. (p) Matt. iii. 7.

(83)

God let himself to humble us, we should fall
under his love. More we may—we ought—
Not complain of God, but lament our wickedness
and to justify him. We should labour for this
—for a heart that repents more for sin, than
for punishment. Let
(2) Under our deepest distress still honour
God by hope in his promised mercy—know
your lot in brief, by faith in his moment and
intercession. Let your God “take vengeance”
on your foes—yet rejoice in the riches of that
grace, which “shows not all their iniquities,”
which “for his name,” and his sons “take”
pardon all their iniquities.

Happy souls that know how thus to submit
to the corrections and yet rejoice in the mercy
of a forgiving God.
Finally, let impatient sinners feel the swift
and dangerous of consciousness which they stand
in. Even the sharp reprobation of God’s
word, in this world, what will be the
will of his reprobation in the last day?
—Believe in the other world, and
other kind of vengeance for the impatient and
inconsistent world. I am afraid I am afraid
“I shall be revealed more bitter, in flaming fire.”
“I shall be revealed more bitter, in flaming fire.”
and only not the power of our Lord Jesus
Christ. May this thought kindly re-
fresh your minds, and engage you “to fly from
the wrath to come.” Amen.



T H E E N D